

Towards An Ethics Of Location

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Settlement is traumatic, a form of exile that over time comes to seem like being at home (Turner, 1999: 22).

What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing (Arendt, 1958: 5).

And Reb Lima [taught]: “Freedom awakens gradually as we become conscious of our ties, like the sleeper of his senses. Then, finally, our actions have a name.”

A teaching which Reb Zalé translated into this image: “You think that it is the bird who is free. You are deceived; it is the flower.”

And Reb Elat into this motto: “Love your ties to their last splendour, and you will be set free.” (Jabès, 1972: 115, original in italics)

Reflections On A Landscape Of Exile

As a settler Australian and as a representative of the ‘old-identity, Anglo-Celtic core culture’ (Dixson, 1999: 7) my initial response to a conversation around the theme of ‘Landscapes of Exile’ is to feel spectacularly ill equipped to participate. My everyday experience is far from exilic. Indeed, in the place in which I am writing, I am one of the locals. As it is generally construed, the experience of being a settler local has little relation, except perhaps as an antonym, to the trauma of being exiled from one’s place of birth (Garbutt, 2007 forthcoming). We locals are very much at home: relaxed and comfortably settled. My concerns, then, do not generally circulate around exile so much as issues of (the potential loss of) comfort. I’m reminded here of some words from Bundjalung Elder Aunty June Gordon, spoken over a quiet cup of coffee: ‘I think I’ve got you white fellas sorted out. All you’re worried about is comfort and safety’ (Gordon, 2005).

Yet through Aunty June’s words *and* in her presence I am prompted to reconsider my initial lack of connection with a ‘landscape of exile’. Sitting together over a coffee, talking and listening here in this postcolonising landscape, in the space enveloping an Aboriginal Elder and a middle-aged settler local, multiple connections can be made with experiences of exile, with landscapes of exile, with peril and with safety. These many connections, most of them beyond my apprehension or comprehension, form the *mise-en-scène* for this chapter: a chapter which considers the absence of exile in the language of Anglo-Celtic Australian settler belonging and then begins to re-frame that belonging by proposing an alternative ethic of location for settler Australians.¹ This ethic of location attempts to break with a language of settlement (Davis, 2005: 8) and reconnect settlers with a language of migration, including exile. Further, it attempts to unsettle a settled sense of proprietorial and possessive *belonging* and re-imagine a settler identity constructed through multiple *connections* to a variety of places.

Three Scenes, One Language: The Australian Language Of Settlement

Scene 1

This chapter is written in Bundjalung country, however, I situate myself within a different imaginary geography: a settler imaginary of the land. I say this not to deny Bundjalung claims to this place but to acknowledge the imaginary that informs my first language for this country. This is the imaginary to which I am habitually bound to return and draw upon: through language to repeat, and in practice to re-enact. The traces of these habits connect generations.

So in the first language of my imaginary...

I was born in Lismore on the far north coast of New South Wales. My mother and father were also born in Lismore. Mum grew up in South Lismore, dad in Green Forest. My mother's family, a railway family that followed the construction of railways north, came from somewhere down near Bathurst and from the New South Wales South Coast. At some point, more distant maternal relatives arrived in Australia from Scotland and Leicestershire. These are impressions rather than facts. On my father's side, his parents emigrated from near Helmsley in Yorkshire in the late 1800s. They bought a farm at Green Forest and another at Tuncester 5 miles from Lismore and it was at Tuncester that I spent the first three years of my life, before mum and dad left dairying and floods and headed into town and the hills of East Lismore. Those East Lismore hills and paddocks in which I played explorer and naturalist as a child is now Southern Cross University where I work.

I grew up with a sense of this family story as a monocultural Anglo-Celtic story of rootedness in Lismore. By turning the family tree upside down, however, there is a reverse sense—a sense of branching and dispersal, an international diasporic movement. It is, however, without any sense of diaspora that I grew up as one of the Lismore locals: 'Born and bred', as they say. Rooted in place, despite the movement that lies not so long ago in the past. It is *as if* I and the culture in which I have my being have sprung from the local earth: we locals speak and act as white "autochthons" (Garbutt, 2006b).

Scene 2

Sitting with a close, elderly relative the other day, our conversation turned to tennis. A young Australian named Chris Guccione had played the game of his life in the 2007 *Adelaide International* tournament.

My relative made the comment, 'Did you watch that young fellow win? It was so exciting! He had an unusual name though—his parents must have come here from somewhere else'.

Scene 3

During the summer of 2005 in the Sydney beach-side suburb of Cronulla inter-ethnic conflict surfaced between 'white' locals and young people of 'Middle-Eastern appearance' from the suburbs to the west. On 10 December *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported:

For [Cronulla local] Shaun Donohoe it's war; pure and simple and it has been a long time coming. "It's been brewing for years." For another local ... it's time for a showdown – though it's not about race, he says, just manners. "They have no respect for anyone." Angered by what they see as an aggressive invasion by youths of Middle Eastern background, these men say they have had enough. (McMahon, 2005)

On Sunday 11 December 2005 this anger transformed into action. As a result of media reports and mobile phone text messages a crowd of 5000 people gathered at Cronulla (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2006). According to *The Sydney Morning Herald* "'Da Boys"—the Cronulla locals—turned up early and by 10am a party atmosphere was already underway' (Murphy, 2005: 4). Some in the crowd held banners aloft with the words 'Respect locals or piss off!' printed on them (Ramage, 2005). By the end of a day of racist chanting, running mobs and street violence thirteen people had been assaulted.

That evening, the Sydney television station TCN 9 (2005) led their top-rating prime-time news bulletin with the story:

It started out as a show of numbers by locals wanting to protect Cronulla, but by mid-afternoon it had turned into scenes not seen before in Sydney: angry mobs, fuelled by alcohol, turning on individuals because of their ethnic background.

One of those individuals was assaulted by a mob after he responded to the taunt ‘... all you wogs go back to where you came from’. Pointing to the Australian flags being waved he said, ‘Hey, bud, that’s my flag too, mate. That’s my flag too, I was born here’ (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2006).

In each of these scenes the Australian language of settlement represents a landscape imagined as the native land of the settler. In this imagined landscape ‘the mantle of belonging to the land (autochthony)’ has passed from Aborigine to settler (Rose, 2004: 117), but that is not all. The act of the mantle being passed on is forgotten. In the language of settlement, the settlers *are* the *first* possessors (Harris, 1993: 1726-1727, n. 68). First possession confers the assumption of prior moral rights to speak and act on behalf of the land, and in the Australian language of settlement this moral right is invested in particular earth-born identities: in ‘the locals’ and in the ‘native-born’ settlers—all born and bred natives of the Australian nation. Through being ‘born and bred’ (Edwards, 2000: 84) the ‘Anglo-Celtic natives’ (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 2007: 10) and the locals have kinship ties to a colonial ethnic heritage derived from the United Kingdom as well as to an inheritance of the place and nation of their birth. The Australian language of settlement, then, represents a complex imaginary that is at once local, national and transnational, each scale necessary to its effective (re)production and functioning.

In its representation of identities and landscape, the Australian language of settlement also silences or speaks-over other voices, representations and ways of imagining Australia. It initially silences Aborigines as first possessors by installing the settler as autochthon. And while it could be expected that there might be some dis-ease (and there is) in the retelling of the story, in local detail, of how it was that the nation came into being when the mantle of autochthony was passed from one people to another, this is quickly dispelled. It is dispelled by the language itself which remembers the story as a story of *settlement*, of working the soil and putting down roots.

Meanwhile, the other story that is unsettling, the process of departing from a known place to an unknown place, of translating a form of life from Europe to the antipodes, is left without words. The Australian language of *settlement* has no language for *migration* except for those who come after, who are next, who forever embody migration as “migrants”, who come here from ‘somewhere else’, who are not locals, who are not native-born. It has no language for a story that keeps the migration of Anglo-Celtic settlers in mind as migrants.

From an Ethos of Settlement towards an Ethics of Location

Language is a form of social practice and as such it is conditioned by social conventions (Fairclough, 2001: 18). Social structures, then, give rise to certain structures in language, and conversely language plays a part in the (re)production of those social structures. Language, therefore, portrays certain social structures and practices as common sense, natural or normal and so is a fundamental tool for the maintenance of power structures and power relations between social actors (Smith, 2006: 82).

Allan Pred (1990: 33) puts this more eloquently:

Linguistic repertoire—the full range of recognized representations by which one can act purposefully—is never uniformly distributed among the population of a given area. Nor is it spawned within a vacuum. Instead, linguistic repertoire – the words, viable meanings, pronunciation, grammar ... – is an inevitable by-product of one’s social roots, a part of one’s earlier and still continuing constitution as a subject, one’s previous and still ongoing day-to-day history, the practices one has or has not entered into. ... Individual and collective repertoires are thereby inseparable from power relations that

are ultimately a matter of who may or may not do what, when and where; from power relations that ... otherwise simultaneously open up and restrict the (time)-spaces of human action.

Language, in short, is expressive of an ethos—the ‘customary attitudes, values, and practices of a group [as they] *are*’ (Ball, 2005: 31, emphasis in original). The Australian language of settlement is expressive of a settler ethos: a normative projection of the settler past into the present and future. Exile is re-presented as if ‘being at home’ (Turner, 1999: 22). This language has played its part in the formation of a settler nation, however, in the remainder of this chapter I argue that as a nation moving towards ‘post-settler’ status, the settler language needs to express an ethics that is more conscious of its present and future locations. This ethics I call an ethics of location.

From an ethos of settlement

In my analysis, the ethos that is expressed through the Australian language of settlement is encapsulated in the idea of white “autochthony”, that sense in which settler Australians are able to speak of themselves unproblematically and assertively as the locals and as native Australians (Garbutt, 2006b). In saying this I am not attempting to deny settler Australians a deep relationship with local places or the nation, but I do want to emphasise the way these expressions normalise settlers within local places and the nation. The way, for example, the locals are always white and Aborigines can never, with specific exceptions, be locals (Garbutt, 2005: §III). The way, too, that from the 1870s to the 1930s “Aboriginal native” was the term officially referring to Aborigines (Chesterman & Galligan, 1997: 87-88), whereas ‘the word native is almost universally applied to white colonists born in Australia’ (Trollope, 1967: 101).

In his analysis of this latter language formation, Pal Ahluwalia (2001: 64-65) notes that:

The idea that white colonists born in Australia were natives whilst the indigenous population were not was an important one. It was an idea that went to the heart of the manner in which the continent was settled. The myth of *terra nullius* was dependent upon the non-recognition of the local population and the ‘indigenisation’ of their white conquerors.

Proposing an Australian response to Mamdani’s question for postcolonial Africa, ‘When does a settler become a native?’ (1998: 251), Ahluwalia asserts ‘this occurred when white colonists were locally-born’ (2001: 66).

One key point of interest in Ahluwalia’s analysis is his assertion that being born in Australia was a precondition for the idea of *terra nullius* to take a place in the colonial imaginary. In this understanding the new land gives metaphorical birth to the ‘white locals’ whose roots are sunk deep into the soil (Griffiths, 1996: 220 & 224) and this, it turns out, is a transformation of the settlers’ transported British culture, specifically the born and bred system of kinship rearticulated with colonialism in a new land. This British system of kinship, which Jeanette Edwards (2000: 29) argues might almost be thought of as a Western system of kinship, closely articulates being *born*—the ‘immutable place of birth’—and *bred*—‘the effects of a variable upbringing’ (Edwards, 2000: 84). Thus, it is a kinship system that is both normative and symbolic: ‘it is made up of a code of conduct (what people do and say they do) and ideas of shared substance (symbolized in idioms of blood and increasingly genes)’ (Edwards, 2000: 28). Thus, in the site of Edwards’ research, the town of Bacup near Manchester:

The statement ‘Bacup born and bred’ embraces two significant aspects of English kinship.... [I]t is not enough to be born in Bacup, one also needs to be reared in Bacup. The experience of being *brought up* in the town is said to be influential: it moulds a particular kind of character (84).

Edwards work clearly outlines the form that born and bred kinship takes, with implications for Australian identities. The place of being bred is thought to mould one's character (here the idea of the emergence of the 'Australian type' in the late 1800s is salient) and birth connects a person into a particular genetic and racialised lineage (an 'Australian type' born of British stock). And here I think of Issa, the man assaulted in Scene 3 above, whose claim of being born here cannot be reconciled with being 'born and bred' under the flag of the putatively Anglo-Saxon crowd. There is a line of demarcation around being born and bred of the nation, and around being a Cronulla local that may well be to do with custom and religion, but undeniably has racial links also. This is an exclusionary and racialised aspect of the settler ethos.

Born and bred kinship has had additional consequences for the Australian settler ethos: a proprietorial aspect to identity and belonging. We see it in what 'started out as a show of numbers by locals wanting to *protect Cronulla*' (TCN9, 2005, my emphasis) and in the assumption of a moral right to public space in the command to outsiders that they 'Respect locals or piss off!' (Ramage, 2005). Nigel Rapport writes that in the site of his fieldwork, the English village of Wanet, the locals have a sense of moral priority with respect to locality. 'Indeed,' Rapport says,

morality might be glossed as the rights conferred upon people by their local belonging, in particular their ownership of local land – their priority over land. What is moral in Wanet is ... an absolute right to defend 'local' borders against 'outsider' trespass (1997: 74-75).

For Jeanette Edwards and Marilyn Strathern this articulation of ownership and morality is a product of a kinship system in which there is a strong normative element, that is, in which exclusion can result from not fitting in despite blood ties. It is for this reason they believe the idea of belonging is not a neutral term but within born and bred kinship cultures has positive overtones (2000: 152). That is:

There is a moral propriety to the indigenous English concept of 'ownership' which suggests that it is as natural to (want to) possess things, as part of one's own self-definition, as it is to be part of a community or belong to a family. This gives rise to a proprietorial identity being claimed over a large range of animate, inanimate, and quasi-animate entities, such as one's own past, the place where one lives, inheritance, family names, and so forth. ... Narrating such associations makes chains out of them, and claims can travel along chains. (Edwards & Strathern, 2000: 149)

The Euro-American concept of ownership, then, has 'connotations of alienable possessions and inalienable possessiveness' (Edwards & Strathern, 2000: 153). It is in this sense that locals can make possessive claims that are based on social 'ownership' of a range of items of significance (including public land) and outside of property law.

I have made this rather long diversion through born and bred kinship for one primary reason: to use the ideas of Edwards and Strathern to expand on the ethos that white "autochthony" encapsulates. White "autochthony" is a way of imagining the articulation of place and identity which emerges from being born and bred, not at home but in (post)colonial Australian exile; in a place already occupied and to which Indigenous Australians belong. Born and bred kinship assists with, perhaps drives, the act of wresting the mantle of autochthony from Aborigines and with a particular productive effect. It gives rise to a sense of possessive belonging to this new land, and conversely, possession of the land and soil. The new settler Australian character and culture that emerges born and bred from the soil is protected within a spatio-temporal enclave—no longer a product of multiple connections to sites but peculiar to this bounded place called home. The born and bred Anglo-Celtic Australian, then, is no migrant but comes from here and always has done so, with little sense of being part of a diaspora (Nicolacopoulos & Vassilacopoulos, 2004: 45). It is others like

Chris Guccione or his parents that have come from elsewhere. It is they who don't quite belong.

Towards an ethics of location

This settler ethos, the set of customary attitudes, values and practices, which goes with being born and bred—not “back home” as my grandparents might say, but here in Australia—sets patterns which no longer work for settlers in a steadily interconnecting and postcolonising world. The ‘real’ autochthons have their own voice that destabilises the white ‘autochthons’ present being. Others who have migrated, by demanding their right to equally belong in a place on this earth, rub uncomfortably in the heat and humidity against my sticky, possessive settler belonging. When this ethos of settlement is exposed, a new ethics becomes necessary, one that differently locates settler identity within a more general ‘ethics for decolonisation’ (Rose, 2004).

Such an ethics of location can proceed from a critique of the ethos of settlement, but also needs to break with critique. As Deborah Bird Rose advocates (2004: 33), a decolonising ethics is necessarily collaborative and active. Nigel Thrift (2003: 83) writes about how ‘only the smallest part of thinking is explicitly cognitive. ...[A]ll the other thinking ... lies in the body’. In collaborative activity we think with our whole being and in connection with others. A key feature of such action includes conversation that is an ethical dialogue with difference, a dialogue that is a response to the presence of the other. Rose, following Fackenheim, proposes two precepts for this ethical dialogue: situatedness and openness (Rose, 2004: 21-23). The ethical dialogue is situated because ‘our gestures toward others must not exclude analysis of our own histories, geographies, and cultures’ (2005:49). The ethical dialogue is open in that:

the outcome is not known in advance. Openness produces reflexivity, so that one's ground becomes destabilized. In open dialogue one holds one's self available to be surprised, to be challenged, and to be changed (1999: 175).

Within this understanding of the emergence of a decolonising ethics, a critique of the ethos of Australian settlement forms part of the analysis of settler history, geography and culture: it stimulates an awareness of our (I speak as a settler) situation. From amongst an array of possible points from which to begin a critique, two stand out: settler claims of autochthony and possessive belonging.

Autochthony has a range of traditions and it important for me to note that the autochthony I discuss and critique in this chapter is from the Western tradition. On the other hand, the autochthony of the Indigenous Australian tradition is part of the locatedness of a decolonising ethical dialogue.

In the Western tradition a *sense* of autochthonous origins, for one's self and one's culture, serves a number of functions. Firstly, the inequalities and violence that accompany the foundation of the state are forgotten through a single unifying myth. There is ‘a founding forgetting ... of the division unity implies’—a ‘*forgetting of the political as such*’ (Loraux, 2002: 43 and 42, emphasis in the original). National origins in forced transportation, exile and migration give way to a story of putting down roots and settling in. Secondly, autochthony eliminates the question: ‘To whom does, or did, the land belong?’ Without internal political struggle or dispossession of others, autochthony serves to provide a myth of doubly peaceful origins. Thirdly, the status of autochthon automatically marks the citizen from the resident non-citizen and foreigner (Saxonhouse, 1986: 255).

The Western tradition of autochthony which infuses the language of Australian settlement can be thought of as an axiological system which values ‘ontopolitical’ being over dislocated, migratory being. For Derrida, ontopology is an ‘axiomatics linking indissociably the ontological value of present-being [*on*] to its *situation*, to the stable and presentable determination of a locality, the *topos* of a territory, native soil...’ (Derrida, 1994: 82). Underlying this system of values is an assumption that the originary human experience is

sedentary in nature, and that the experience of dislocation is subsequent, derivative and lesser-than. The system accords the form of life of those who are supposedly in-place a status superior to those who are migratory or dis-located, and this hierarchy may be reified and distributed amongst a range of identities, from the settler to the refugee (Malkki, 1992: 31). And yet, Derrida argues, displaced-being is just as original a human experience as sedentary-being. As Levinas puts it, 'he or she who emigrates is fully human: the migration of man does not destroy, does not demolish the meaning of being' (Levinas, 1998: 117).

The ontology of Australian settlement organises claims of belonging in a hierarchy. It consigns Aboriginal belonging to a separate place and time, to wild enclaves within the nation and to prehistory (Garbutt, 2004: 109-114). Native and local settler belonging are accorded the priority associated with deep-roots in the civic soil. The belonging of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers is by degrees devalued or, in the case of asylum seekers, reluctantly, if ever, conceded. Adorno sums up the situation as follows: 'All ruling strata claim to be the oldest settlers, autochthonous ...the brutal, barbaric lore whereby he who was there first has the greatest rights...' (1978: 155).

Inherent in this system is a conception of (local or national) places as bounded, and within those bounds exists an 'old, settled ... coherence' (Massey, 1994: 123) of a 'place called home' (Massey, 2000: 230). This idea resonates with a view of place seen from the inside and with a sense of autochthonous belonging arising from within the bounds of place. A sense of place that arises from its *relations* with other places, from interconnections beyond the bounds is thereby ignored. Just as the language of settlement denies settlers words for themselves as migrants, similarly, it denies the white "autochthons" an identity formed through connections with multiple places.

This autochthonic form of belonging to only one place articulates, through born and bred kinship, with an exclusive mode of possession. Belonging, thereby, becomes a zero sum game where any other group's claim of belonging threatens the belonging of settlers. The claim of a man of Lebanese descent to be born and bred under the flag provokes anxiety and anger. It demands the assimilation of otherness, or its expulsion. 'Respect locals or piss off!' Beholden to the fear of exile, coexistence of belongings seems unthinkable.

'Once Perilous, Now Safe'

The inscription on the Byron Bay Lighthouse, where the conference which inspired this collection of essays took place, reads *Olim periculum nunc salus*—Once Perilous, Now Safe. Images of a ship in the night lashed by raging seas and driving rain come to mind, and then of the light leading the vessel to the sheltered waters of the bay. Here safety has the form of an escape from danger to shelter.

This essay, however, considers another form of safety: that of making safe in an enduring sense. For this form of safety two patterns come to mind: that of the defensive fortification and that of the welcoming hearth. These, of course are extremes on a continuum, but they serve as equipment for thinking.

The initial thrust of this chapter has been to argue that the language of Australian settlement has functioned as a settler fortification in which settler belonging has been established and made safe. The stance is defensive, controlling entry to local and national belonging through policing boundary conditions for claims of being born and bred, being local, being native-born, being sons and daughters of the civic soil.

Such limits on belonging are no longer tenable, not that they ever were. The global and postcolonising politics of the moment makes the ethos expressed and normalised through settler Australian language more and more obvious, and made obvious, ethically unsupportable. A new ethos is required, and an ethics to bring it into being.

This ethics would be conscious of its present location, and in its presence, would emerge as a work in progress and a work in practice. For settler Australians, for us locals, I would propose a number of specific aspects. To begin, the language of Australian settlement

is no longer a sufficient basis for an Australian language of belonging. The language as it stands buttresses the moral priority of Anglo-Celtic belonging in a nation where Anglo-Celtic settler identity is one identity among many. Indeed, I suggest that the idea of settler belonging articulates so strongly with a “born and bred” proprietorial identity that it can only function in a possessive mode. In an ethics of location it is better for settlers to think in terms of *connections with*, rather than *belonging to*. place.

Further, the sense of deep rootedness that accompanies settler Australian belonging needs re-imagining. Settlers are part of a diaspora, part of the flow of migration that has so significantly shaped Australia in the modern era. The connection to place that settlers have, then, is multiple. The place of birth is significant, but so too are the places we live in and travel to throughout our lives, so too are the places to which our parents, grandparents and forebears beyond were connected. In an ethics of location recognising these multiple connections mean multiple places are made relevant to settler identity (Myers, 2006: 325).

Autochthonic ways of thinking, thinking as a settler rather than as a migrant, produces a form of hubris, as if the way we settlers do things around here is a tradition emerging from and in sympathy with where we live. A dose of humility—of the migrant learning about a new place—is required, for the benefit of the land and of the people settlers feel don’t quite belong. With a sense of humility we might also shake from ourselves the mantle of autochthony and acknowledge we are a product of invasion with much to learn from the autochthonous Australians we settlers have cleared from our imaginations.

The ethics of location, as I am trying to think of it here, is an attempt ‘to think what we are doing’ (Arendt, 1958: 5) here in this place. It is an attempt to re-imagine an Australian language for place that does not place the settler safely separate within a fort but as one identity around a hearth of hospitality and welcome. In encouraging connection, the hope for this ethics is a presence that is not *as if* an autochthon, *as if* at home, but humbly here connected with others.

End-note

¹ My thanks to Baden Offord for suggesting the term ‘ethics of location’. This chapter draws on Chapter 7, ‘Towards and ethics of location’, in Garbutt (2006a). I also wish to acknowledge Betsan Martin’s (2000) prior description of an ‘ethics of cultural difference and location’ which utilises the work of Irigaray and Levinas to consider the possibilities for cultural co-existence in Aotearoa-New Zealand. Previous to this, Lawrence Venuti (1998: 188-189) described an ‘ethics of location’ in translation studies.

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